

Message Text

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43

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FM AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

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TAGS: PGOV, EI

SUBJECT: CHILDERS' FUNERAL: MECHANICS OF SUCCESSION

1. AS THERE IS NO VICE PRESIDENT, PRESIDENTIAL POWERS ARE BEING EXERCISED BY A THREE-MAN COMMISSION UNTIL A NEW PRESIDENT CAN BE ELECTED. THIS POSES NO PROBLEM, SINCE PRESIDENCY IS CEREMONIAL OFFICE, ALMOST ENTIRELY WITHOUT POWER. THE COMMISSION MEMBERS ARE: CHIEF JUSTICE T.F. O'HIGGINS (WHO WAS CHILDERS OPPONENT IN PRESIDENTIAL RACE); SEAN TREACY, CHAIRMAN OF THE DAIL; AND PROFESSOR J.C. DOOGE, CHAIRMAN OF THE SENATE.

2. NEW ELECTION MUST BE HELD WITHIN 60 DAYS. AT PRESENT, NONE OF THE MAJOR POLITICAL PARTIES ARE ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT ENTERING RACE. PUBLIC IS CONSIDERED SOMEWHAT TIRED OF ELECTIONS AND POLITICIANS ARE CERTAINLY WEARY OF CAMPAIGNS, HAVING JUST COMPLETED VIGOROUS BY-ELECTION. FULL-SCALE CAMPAIGN OVER HOLIDAYS IS NOT ATTRACTIVE PROSPECT. UNDER BEST OF CIRCUMSTANCES, NO PARTY WANTS TO PUT ITS TOP MEN FORWARD FOR PRESIDENCY, SINCE THEY ARE NEEDED FOR ACTIVE POLITICAL DUTIES. ON OTHER HAND, NO PARTY WANTS TO SUFFER DEFEAT AND CONSEQUENT DAMAGE TO PRESTIGE. PARTIES ARE THUS FACED WITH CHOICE OF PUTTING A
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CAPABLE MAN INTO EFFECTIVE RETIREMENT OR RISKING DISCREDIT.

ONE SOLUTION IS TO PICK A DISTINGUISHED PERSON WHO WANTS TO LEAVE ACTIVE POLITICAL LIFE FOR AGE OR OTHER REASONS. IN DAYS AFTER CHILDERS' FUNERAL, TWO OR THREE SUCH CANDIDATES MAY BE NOMINATED. (LABOR PARTY HAS OPTION OF CAMPAIGNING EITHER SEPARATELY OR IN COALITION WITH FINE GAEIL.) ANOTHER SOLUTION WOULD BE FOR BOTH PARTIES TO SETTLE ON AN "AGREED CANDIDATE." THIS OPTION MAY ALSO BE CHOSEN, BUT THERE IS ONE IMPORTANT PRACTICAL DIFFICULTY: FINDING A CANDIDATE EQUALLY ACCEPTABLE TO ALL PARTIES. THIS WOULD NOT BE EASY, SINCE THERE IS STRONG IRISH TRADITION OF FRICTION BETWEEN PARTIES. EXAMPLES OF POTENTIAL "AGREED CANDIDATES" SO FAR MENTIONED ARE: CEARBHALL O DALAIGH (FORMER CHIEF JUSTICE, NOW ON EUROPEAN COURT OF JUSTICE); FREDERICK H. BOLAND, CHANCELLOR OF TRINITY COLLEGE AND FORMER PERM REP AT UN; AND SEAN MACBRIDE.

3. IN PRACTICE, PARTIES HAVE BARELY BEGUN CONSIDERING OPTIONS AND NO DECISION IS LIKELY UNTIL AFTER FUNERAL.
MOORE

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